DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 340 051 CS 507 634

AUTHOR McGee, Brian R.; Simerly, Greggory
TITLE Academic Debate and the Rhetoric of Emancipation: Habermas and Instrumental Reality.
PUB DATE Nov 91
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (77th, Atlanta, GA, October 31-November 3, 1991).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Debate; Higher Education; *Persuasive Discourse; *Rhetoric; *Rhetorical Criticism; *Social Change
IDENTIFIERS Competitive Argument; Debate Strategies; *Debate Theory; *Habermas (Jurgen)

ABSTRACT

Many academic debaters have adopted a rhetoric of emancipation, which seeks to identify oppressive features in the material conditions of contemporary society. Debaters now often advocate a wholesale rejection of the current system. This emancipatory rhetoric illustrates some components of Jurgen Habermas' critical apparatus. In turn, that apparatus helps identify some ways in which emancipatory rhetoric is problematic. Habermas, the leading living proponent of critical theory, distinguishes between purposive-rational action (work), which includes instrumental rationality, and communicative action (interaction). Habermas criticizes the reduction of reason to scientific and technological thought. He seeks to analyze communication as the creation of an optimal discursive space free from time and space constraints and the influence of domination. Habermas advances the notion that an ideal speech situation, free from distortion, would result eventually in justified consensus. The questions and demands of emancipatory rhetoric are practical, and cannot be resolved within the technical sphere. To escape instrumental and strategic rationality, debaters must abandon those rationalities in favor of communicative action. However, even the use of emancipatory rhetoric in debate is instrumental, as the goal is to win debates. Moreover, emancipatory rhetoric cannot receive a fair hearing within the dominant language game of debate. The game itself must move from the instrumental to the practical. (Twenty-six references are attached.) (SG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED340051

Academic Debate and the Rhetoric of Emancipation: Habermas and Instrumental Rationality

Brian R. McGee
Department of Speech Communication and Theatre
Northeast Louisiana University
Monroe, Louisiana 71209-0324

with

Greggory Simerly
Department of Communication
Saint Louis University
3733 West Pine Boulevard
Saint Louis, Missouri 63108

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Speech Communication Association Convention
Atlanta, November 1991

CS507634

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Brian R. McGee
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Philosophy insists that the actions and aims of man [sic] must not be the product of blind necessity. Neither the concepts of science nor the form of social life, neither the prevailing way of thinking nor, the prevailing mores should be accepted by custom and practiced uncritically. Philosophy has set itself against mere tradition and resignation in the decisive problems of existence, and it has shouldered the unpleasant task of throwing the light of consciousness even upon those human relations and modes of reaction which have become so deeply rooted that they seem natural, immutable, and eternal (p. 257).

---Max Horkheimer (1972)
Critical Theory

. . . philosophy is a way of reflecting on our relation to the truth. But it must not end there. It's a way of asking oneself: if such is the relation that we have with truth, then how should we conduct ourselves? I think that it has done and continues today to do a very considerable and multiple labor, which modifies at the same time both our connection to the truth and our way of conducting ourselves. And this in a complex conjunction between a whole series of researchers and a whole set of social movements. It's the very life of philosophy (p. 201).

---Michel Foucault (1989)
Foucault Live

Academic Debate and the Rhetoric of Emancipation:

Habermas and Instrumental Rationality

While it is still safe to assert that academic debate is loosely rooted in the Western rhetorical tradition, scholarship on debate is not generally held in high regard. Outlets for debate scholarship are relatively plentiful,[1] but a heavy emphasis on debate research is often considered a weakness by senior faculty in tenure, promotion, and hiring decisions. Considerable anecdotal evidence suggests that debate research is not considered "respectable" by many scholars in the speech communication discipline.

Our own observation leads us to suspect that some debate research <u>is</u> shoddy and second-rate. But a more fundamental reason exists for the low regard in which many of our peers hold academic debate research. As Thomas Conley (1990) has commented, philosophers have increasingly turned to rhetoric in the twentieth century. Ordinary language philosophy, phenomenology, critical theory, and French poststructuralism have focused on human communication in varying efforts to ground truth-claims or to "unground" those same claims. In turn, contemporary rhetoricians have been heavily influenced by the philosophy of human communication. With this shift to a philosophical emphasis, the practice-driven environment of the debate tournament (and the practice-driven scholarship which that environment seems to encourage) is often of little interest to the rhetorician.

If our observations about current attitudes toward debate research are correct, then an explicit defense of scholarship related to academic debate is required if the place of academic debate within the discipline is to retain the continued respect and interest of the speech communication community. The once taken-for-granted connection between rhetoric and debate must again be emphasized. Of course, even a casual review of forensics journals suggests that ongoing developments in the theory and practice of rhetorical criticism have influenced, for example, the long-running discussion of judging paradigms. Balthrop (1983) turns to the hermeneutic tradition to inform his analysis of the judge in interpreting academic debates as texts. Ulrich (1984) argues that debate could be viewed as dialectic by debate jduges. Rowland (1984) addresses our concerns more directly. He notes that in at least one context academic debate can serve as a field laboratory for the evaluation of argumentation theory.

We concur with Rowland on this evaluation, though not necessarily with his larger conclusions. Academic debate provides students with an opportunity to develop and refine an array of argumentation skills, but debate is not limited to this educational function. We see academic debate as a microcosm of the public sphere, where student argumentation might suggest revisions in rhetorical theory and confirm and/or disconfirm already extant theories. If a more famous McGee (1990, p. 279) is correct when he argues that a larger emphasis should be placed on rhetoric as an art which is performative, that "rhetoric is what rhetoricians do," then a focus on debaters as rhetors might

be useful. Additionally, debate might speak to the relation of philosophy to social criticism, especially in an era when "philosophy, having become circumscribed as a specific discipline, can legitimately go beyond the area reserved to it by assuming the role of interpreter between one specialized narrow-mindedness and another" (Habermas, 1970a, p. 8). Whatever the practical difficulties with the "non-policy" debate associated with the Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA), the deemphasis on the pragmatics of policy advocacy in CEDA might allow more undergraduate experimentation with the arguments prevalent in contemporary philosophical disputes.

Using components of the critical apparatus of Jurgen Habermas and other critical theorists, we will argue that many academic debaters have adopted a rhetoric of emancipation. Following Rorty (1984, p. 172), who sees the rhetoric of emancipation as "the notion of a kind of truth which is **not** one more production of power," we understand this rhetoric to focus on identifying oppressive features in the material conditions of contemporary society, as well as identifying the discursive practices which reproduce and sustain this oppression. We are concerned with the argument choices of undergraduate debaters (and their coaches) as they pertain to our thesis.

As the quotations from Horkheimer and Foucault placed at the beginning of this paper suggest, philosophy has a social function, as well as a role in the development and evaluation of theoretical propositions. If our depiction of academic debate is a useful one, then we might conclude that our best faculty rhetoricians are not the only persons in our discipline who have

turned to philosophy for guidance. In their own ways, the undergraduate advocates currently in training in academic debate also are influenced by contemporary philosophy. They, too, seek to throw "the light of consciousness even upon those human relations and modes of reaction which have become so deeply rooted that they seem natural, immutable, and eternal" (Horkheimer, 1972, p. 257).

Debate and the Rhetoric of Emancipation

The debate judge of the 1950s would be shocked by many aspects of academic debating in the 1990s. The evolution of delivery practices--towards a rapid rate of delivery, heavy reliance on evidence, changes in format, and so on--has been so widely analyzed and critiqued that we see no need to review this evolution here.[2] In the ongoing effort to attack or defend delivery practices and other points of contention in contemporary debate, perhaps too little attention has been paid to the evolution in argument choices made by debaters over the last few decades. Debaters still regularly attempt to save democracy and avoid nuclear war within the language game of the dominant social and political paradigm, but, increasingly, debates revolve around proposals for sweeping social and economic change which imply the need for a <u>new</u> language game.[3] Rather than suggesting incremental reforms within the current U.S. political system, debaters often advocate a wholesale rejection of the current system. Whether they focus on the political and economic liberation of African-Americans, the emergence of a feminist consciousness, or the need for a deep ecological, environmental

ethic, these debaters propose alterations in the world of U.S.-American politics which could only be called radical. Indeed, encompassing all these varieties of argument is the implicit or explicit claim that Western culture must be transformed through a "consciousness change" or "paradigm shift" (see Capra [1982]). In Rorty's terms, this sort of advocacy is emancipatory because it does not seek to reproduce the power relations which characterize the dominant social order.

In a varsity CEDA debate which the first author judged recently, the affirmative and negative debaters unhesitatingly stipulated that the current system was racist and sexist, and was doomed for these reasons to destroy the planet in a nuclear conflagration unless sweeping changes were made in the current political, economic, and sociocultural order. The debate focused only on identifying the means (systemic or non-systemic) by which society should move away from the current political system.

This debate was not an aberration, though varsity debaters might be more likely to utilize an emancipatory rhetoric than are their less experienced counterparts in novice and junior varsity divisions. In CEDA debate competition, debaters in the 1988 and 1989 National Tournament final rounds made arguments in favor of the environmental ethic and feminism. In the 1988 CEDA final round, Mark West from Southern Illinois concluded his second affirmative rebuttal speech with the observation that "the criteria in this debate is the preservation of the ecosystem. . . . Please extend contention one and contention two, indicating (A) subpoint that the media is the old paradigm, it is supported by the autonomous press, and this is the greatest threat to man

[sic] and the earth" (Freeley, 1990, p. 373). In the 1987 Final Round of the National Debate Tournament, the negative team from Dartmouth College utilized a strategy which was almost totally dependent on winning a feminism disadvantage. Even though Dartmouth "lost" the debate, interestingly, one judge felt compelled to express her support for the feminist project even as she cast a vote against Dartmouth.

More interesting than the prevalence of emancipatory arguments are the reasons for the use of these arguments by debaters, as well as the lessons we might draw from the use of these arguments. Obviously, the selection of these arguments often has a strategic purpose. Given the enormity of the changes proposed by some scholars working in the traditions of critical theory and academic feminism, as well as the magnitude of the problems identified by these same scholars, the importance of these critiques of contemporary society often seems to dwarf the significance of incremental policy changes, for example, which might make a "win" easier to accomplish. But debaters also make certain kinds of arguments because they enjoy making them, and prefer those arguments to other alternative sorts of advocacy which might also be strategically sound.

The shift towards a rhetoric of emancipation in both NDT and CEDA debate provides an opportunity to utilize academic debate as an argument laboratory which illustrates broader sorts of emancipatory advocacy. Specifically, we suggest that this emancipatory rhetoric illustrates some components of Habermas' critical apparatus. In turn, that same critical apparatus helps us identify some ways in which this emancipatory rhetoric is

problematic. Further development of our thesis requires a brief review of Habermas' project. We begin with a discussion of instrumental rationality, and continue to explore instrumental rationality as it is described by Habermas.

Instrumental Rationality and Communicative Action

In our own discussion of instrumental reason and emancipatory rhetoric, we rely heavily on the work of Jurgen Habermas, one of the most prominent social critics of the twentieth century and the leading living proponent of critical theory. Thomas McCarthy (1975), Habermas's principle U.S. translator and interpreter, noted almost two decades ago that Habermas was "the most influential thinker in Germany today," and Wenzel (1979) advanced the conjecture by the close of the 1970s that since "his work has come to the attention of scholars in speech communication, we may expect to see his influence spread, for Habermas' wide-ranging investigations offer many insights for many branches of communication studies" (p. 83). Wenzel was correct; Habermas's name has appeared repeatedly in much of the rhetorical research of the last decade (e.g., Jasinski [1988]), and students of rhetoric are often encouraged to examine his work (e.g., Conley [1990]; Foss, Foss, & Trapp [1985]).

Habermas' intellectual project spans several productive decades, and we claim no special expertise in our interpretation of his work. Rather than undertake the formidable task of comparing the work of the "younger" Habermas with the presumably more mature discussion contained in his two-volume Theory of Communicative Action (1984a, 1987), we concentrate on his earlier

efforts as we sketch the outline of his distinction between purposive-rational action (work), where Habermas places instrumental rationality, and communicative action (interaction).

Instrumental rationality has been cast in the role of "foe" or "adversary" in many feminist and postmodern analyses of epistemology. The relationship of truth claims to the maintenance of seemingly irrational modes of societal organization has received much attention. For those who seek to critique this irrationality and to advance a political and intellectual agenda, a focus on the instrumental rationality which has influenced the German intellectual tradition from Weber to Habermas has a certain appeal. This focus sometimes tempts scholars to inappropriately reduce reason solely to instrumental rationality. Hawkesworth (1989) explains that:

> Rather than acknowledging that reason, rationality, and knowledge are themselves essentially contested concepts that have been the subject of centuries of philosophical debate, there is a tendency to conflate all reasoning with one particular conception of rationality, with instrumental reason. Associated with Enlightenment optimism about the possibility of using reason to gain technical mastery over nature, with rigorous methodological strictures for controlled observation and experimentation, with impartial application of rules to ensure replicability, with the rigidity of the fact/value dichotomy and means-ends analysis that leave crucial normative questions unconsidered, with processes of rationalization that threaten to imprison human life in increasingly dehumanized systems, and with the deployment of technology that threatens the annihilation of all life on the planet, instrumental reason makes a ready villain (pp. 542-543).

The wholesale indictment of instrumental reason implied by Hawkesworth's outline is probably unjustifed. Techne serves a useful purpose in an advanced industrial society in which the organization of several modes of everyday life (communication and transportation networks, etc.) requires such a rationality. As

Hawkesworth herself might argue, a more subtle analysis must concentrate on identifying the modes of human existence in which a different rationality is most appropriate. After all, "the real problem, Habermas argues, is not technical reason as such but its universalization, the forfeiture of a more comprehensive concept of reason in favor of the exclusive validity of scientific and technological thought, the reduction of praxis to techne" (McCarthy, 1978, p. 22). The problem for Habermas in particular comes in separating the practical problems of political choice from the technical problems of administration. Practical and technical questions are increasingly collapsed together in contemporary analyses, since "we now commonly think of the practical as being a matter of technical application or know-how" (Bernstein, 1976, p. 187).

The separation of technical from practical begins for Habermas in his discussion of purposive-rational versus communicative action. In his famous 1968 essay in honor of Herbert Marcuse, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'," Habermas (1970a) explains that by "purposive-rational action [work] I understand either instrumental action or rational choice or their conjunction" (p. 91). Instrumental action is identified by the application of "technical rules based on empirical knowledge. In every case they imply conditional predictions about observable events, physical or social. These predictions can prove correct or incorrect" (pp. 91-92). Another variety of purposive-rational action, strategic action, is marked by the use of "strategies based on analytic knowledge. They imply deductions from

preference rules (value systems) and decision procedures" (p. 92).

In contrast, Habermas (1970a) sees communicative action, or interaction, as symbolic action, "governed by binding consensual norms, which define reciprocal expectations about behavior and which must be understood and recognized by at least two acting subjects" (p. 92). It is Habermas' effort to devise a satisfactory accounting of the conditions of communicative action which has received the most critical attention.

What is the point of this work/interaction distinction? As we imply above, it helps Habermas explain the problems created by the confusion of the practical and technical spheres of discourse. While we oversimplify, we see the central goal of Habermas in his analysis of communication as the creation of an optimal discursive space free from the distortions of time and space constraints in which disputes are debated free from the influence of domination. For Habermas, the problem of emancipation may only be resolved discursively, when communicative action is a possibility. Central to the critical apparatus devised by Habermas is the need to ground truth-claims so that we may distinguish "between good arguments and those which are merely successful for a certain audience at a certain time" (Habermas, 1984b, p. 194). He rejects correspondence theories of truth, in which truth is said to be grounded in objective experience, because "even the correspondence theory of truth . . . must be conceived in discursive terms" (Conley, 1990, p. 301). Habermas' concentration on devising a <u>consensus</u> theory of truth is premised on the notion that "truth claims are

redeemed only discursively, through argumentation" (McCarthy, 1975, pp. xv-xvi). All consensus is not created equal, however. Distortions in communication lead to failures in this truth-seeking discourse. When communication is distorted, whether by a lack of sufficient time to discuss a truth claim or by the domination of one speaker over another, the consensus which might be arrived at is not necessarily a justified consensus. A leading cause of distortion in contemporary public discourse is the encroachment of instrumental and strategic rationalities on the discursive domain which should be reserved for communicative action which focuses on practical questions.

What is Habermas' response to this systematically distorted communication? Habermas advances the notion of an "ideal speech situation," in which communication free from distortion would eventually result in a justified consensus. As Elshtain (1982) explains:

> For Habermas, the concept of an ideal speech situation serves as a **worthy** ideal (never perfectly attainable) which helps us to assess other alternatives with clarity and force. Within an ideal speech situation, no compulsion is present other than the force of discourse itself; domination is absent; and reciprocity pertains between and among participants (p. 620; emphasis in original).

The idea for Habermas (1970b) is that the outline of the ideal speech situation is implicit in any speech act, for "the **design** of an ideal speech situation is necessarily implied in the structure of potential speech, since all speech, even of intentional deception is oriented towards the idea of truth" (p. 372; emphasis in original).

Habermas' analysis has generated much critical attention. To his credit, Habermas has responded carefully to his critics

and has refined his position over time. He remains committed, however, to his beliefs regarding the ability to arrive at a justified consensus via argumentation. As he says regarding a critique of his work by Richard Rorty, "we could not even understand the meaning of what we describe from a third-person perspective as argumentative conduct if we had not already learned the performative attitude of a participant in argumentation" (1984b, p. 194). This performative attitude which we all share makes the ideal speech situation a possibility, however unattainable it might be in practice.

Below, we examine the current practice of academic debate on the basis of our understanding of Habermas' critical apparatus. We conclude that the attempt by debaters to critique the current social order is impaired by the reliance of that attempt on a purposive-rational discourse which privileges the technical over the practical. The whole point of radical social criticism is to smash the "iron cage" of technocratic rationality, and debaters often believe that they are engaging in such radical criticism. But their discourse fails them, because they utilize a language game which reduces the evaluation of their advocacy to purposive-rational action. The confusion of practical discourse and technical discourse is ultimately counterproductive, because practical discourse is not attainable when the syntax of that discourse demands an instrumental evaluation of the truth claims which are advanced. And, as Bernstein (1976) summarizes,

> when practical discourse is eliminated or suppressed, the public realm loses--in the classical sense of politics--its political function. The problem has become urgent in our time not only because science and technology are the most important productive forces in advanced inndustrial

> societies, but because a technological consciousness increasingly affects all domains of human life, and serves as a background ideology that has a legitimating power (p. 188; emphasis added).

We provide examples of this "background ideology" operating in academic debate in the next section.

Implications for Academic Debate

Academic debate places purposive-rational action before communicative action in two ways, which we describe below. Our assumption for the remainder of this paper is that an emancipatory rhetoric would only be successful from the perspective of Habermas if that rhetoric fell within the domain of communicative action. The questions raised and the demands made by an emancipatory rhetoric are explicitly practical, and cannot and should not be resolved within the technical sphere. To make arguments about emancipation in a discursive context which emphasizes technical appropriateness makes the success of that emancipatory argumentation unlikely, since the discussion of the technical interferes with practical considerations of political interest. The admission of instrumental and strategic arguments allows the dominant ideology of scientific and technological control to distort practical questions. We come to this conclusion based on our agreement with the analysis of Fowler and Kress (1979), with which Habermas might well be sympathetic:

> Syntax can code a world-view without any conscious choice on the part of a writer or speaker. We argue that the world-view comes to language-users from their relation to the institutions and the socio-economic structure of their society. It is facilitated and confirmed for them by a language use which has society's ideological impress.

> Similarly, ideology is linguistically mediated and habitual for an acquiescent, uncritical reader who has already been socialized into insensitivity to the significance of patterns of language (p. 185).

Debaters cannot escape the limits of instrumental and strategic rationality unless the abandon the language game of those rationalities in favor of communicative action. For Habermas, "political emancipation cannot be identified with technical progress. While rationalization in the dimension of instrumental action signifies . . . extension of technological control, rationalization in the dimension of social [communicative] interaction signifies the extension of communication free from domination" (McCarthy, 1978, p. 23).

We begin with the obvious assertion that little about academic debate is consistent with Habermas' description of the ideal speech situation. The time limits of the traditional debate format and the requirement that debaters adapt to the preferences of a debate judge or judges function to distort the communication which occurs in debate rounds. While the ideal speech situation is probably unattainable even in the best of circumstances, the requirements of contemporary academic debate make it very difficult to even approach Habermas' ideal. Within these considerable limitations, however, how does debate fail to avoid the snare of instrumental and strategic rationality?

First, we wish to focus in particular upon the strategic rationality which underlies so much of contemporary debate. As we suggest in a previous section, debaters utilize emancipatory rhetoric because they believe that such a rhetoric gives them a strategic advantage. Debaters wish to win debates. They

undoubtedly choose arguments which qualify as emancipatory in part because they believe that they will be competitively successful if they utilize these arguments. The choice of an emancipatory argument by many academic debaters is in many respects strategic in Habermas' sense. In a similar vein, one could easily argue that a debater would not make an emancipatory argument if she or he believed that it did not have some prospect for competitive success. The enormous expenditure of time and effort (which are instrumental concerns!) made in researching an uncompetitive argument would be deemed counterproductive. Debaters have a strategic interest in the invention of arguments which should be successful within their own argument community.

The second of our two arguments focuses on the ways in which the discourse of debaters manifests the characteristics of instrumental rationality. As a preface to this argument, we see at least one of the problems for both academic debate and other genres of public debate at the close of the twentieth century as the problem of the "postmodern condition," as Lyotard (1984) characterizes the current era. For Lyotard and other social critics, our era is postmodern because we have grown suspicious of metanarratives; they no longer make sense of our experience. Instead, hundreds of disparate fragments of text assault us daily, and no single metanarrative explains this confused and confusing stream of messages. The fragmentation of culture is reproduced and demonstrated in the discursive practices of debaters. McGee (1990) has argued that our discourse is always itself an unfinished and incomplete fragment which is itself composed of other fragments of text. As he characterizes the

research efforts of debaters, "Henry Kissinger may have chosen 8,000 words to express . . . his opinion of U.S. policy in the Middle East. The debater . . . will represent that discourse in 250 words, reducing and condensing Kissinger's apparently finished text into a fragment that seems more important than the whole from which it came" (p. 280). Out of these disparate fragments the debater constructs her or his own text, which acquires at least a local stability even if the presuppositions which underlie the analysis encapsulated in those different fragments are in tension.

Lyotard criticizes Habermas' analysis as another failed metanarrative which erroneously assumes "that humanity as a collective (universal) subject seeks its common emancipation through the regularization of the 'moves' permitted in all language games and that the legitimacy of any statement resides in its contributing to that emancipation" (1984, p. 66). But argumentation is nevertheless a process that we understand because we have already learned the rules of argument. Habermas' metanarrative trys to impose conditions for resolving truth-claims as he seeks to reveal the criteria for believing that a consensus, once it is achieved, is justified. In this sense, his metanarative can be distinguished from others which give one perspective on truth a preferred position. His analysis insists "only" that we must be able to separate a good argument from one which is successful. In communication which is distorted, some arguments prevail over others, but that success does not itself justify the conclusions implied by those arguments.

Our point here is that the opposition Habermas posits between purposive-rational action and communicative action might still be useful in speculating on the prospects an argument has for "justifiable" success in a particular discursive situation. From the perspective of Habermas, the rhetoric of emancipation adopted by many debaters has little chance of such success. To borrow from Fowler and Kress, the syntax which pervades the discourse of academic debate "codes a world-view" which is instrumental in purpose and antithetical to communicative action. The evaluation of claims made in debaters and the language games which debaters play are characterized by an instrumental rationality which "is governed by technical rules that imply conditional predictions, as well as preference rules that imply conditional imperatives; it is directed to the attainment of goals through the evaluation of alternative choices and the organization of appropriate means" (McCarthy, 1978, p. 26). In short, the language of argument evaluation is instrumental rather than practical.

Many examples of instrumental rationality exist in the language of academic debate. Arguments about the "size" (qualitative and quantitative significance) of "links" (individual premises, usually in an interrelated series of arguments from cause to effect) allow judges to assess the probability of "impact" occurrence, where an impact is the ultimate outcome of a causal sequence of events (e.g., a nuclear war, the decline of democracy, etc.). Questions of impact "size" refer to the magnitude of an outcome when considering how much weight to give one argument as compared to

another in making a final win-loss decision in a debate. Analysis of both link and impact probability concerns the likelihood that the outcomes predicted by an argument will ultimately come to pass. "Uniqueness" arguments emphasize the possibility that a purported cause might only be a correlation or explain that other causes might also trigger the same outcome anyway. "Threshold" or "brink" arguments underscore the extent to which a cause might itself be insufficient to produce the presumed effect. All of these examples signal to us the presence of an instrumental rationality in academic debate, since we believe that almost anyone who has observed a significant number of CEDA or NDT debates in the last few years will acknowledge that this sort of language pervades the discussion of argument evaluation heard at debate tournaments.

The crux of our position here is that debaters who adopt the rhetoric of emancipation ultimately fail to unravel the current confusion of practical with technical, primarily because debaters fail to abandon the language game of instrumental rationality, even as they construct arguments which rightfully belong to action. Instead, whether debating the technical problems of designing computer software for the Strategic Defense Initiative missile defense system or the merits of a new feminist social order, they use the same instrumental language game which props up the current political milieu. This language reduces fundamental practical discussions of the ways in which we ought to order our political system to mundane technical distinctions between fact and value, between "is" and "ought," between the idealistic and the immediately realizable. Those debaters who

only make use of emancipatory rhetoric for strategic reasons undoubtedly do not care about this confusion of practical and technical questions. Those debaters who are interested in emancipatory advocacy for its own sake, however, should understand that their arguments are unlikely to receive a fair hearing within the constraints of instrumental discourse.

We conclude that emancipatory rhetoric cannot receive a fair hearing within the dominant language game of debate, which itself reproduces the dominant instrumental language game of our culture. Debaters who wish to advance emancipatory truth-claims must question the language game which is assumed by most debaters and judges. They must advocate a language game better suited to communicative action, or they risk the discursive reproduction of the very practices they wish to challenge. This approach would amount to a refusal to evaluate feminist arguments or other emancipatory genres of argument by standards unsuited to advocacy which does not fall within the realm of instrumental discourse. While outlining the parameters of that alternative language game is beyond the scope of this paper, the performative competence in argumentation which is acquired by debaters over time <u>can</u> be challenged; it is not an inevitable or unalterable feature of intercollegiate debate. Debaters and judges might agree to debate the language games appropriate to the evaluation of specific resolutions or certain genres of argumentation even as they currently permit the evaluation of theoretical arguments about the appropriate relationship between the resolution and arguments advanced for or against the resolution. In other

words, we advocate making the language game utilized by debaters open to discussion during the debate.

If a shift from instrumental and strategic rationalities to communicative action makes the argumentation which is advanced in some debates "utopian," then so much the better. We do a disservice to our students if the training with which we provide them only prepares them to be effective managers, social scientists, and technicians. As Richard Rorty (1989) reminds us, an essential element of a liberal education at the university level is the preparation of students who are able to envision a more peaceful and just society than the one which confronts them upon graduation. Envisioning such a society will surely require students who are not themselves dominated by the language game of purposive-rational action. They must uncover alternative language games within the sphere of communicative action.

Conclusion

We return to our initial premise: Academic debate provides scholars with an argumentation laboratory which might help us evaluate contemporary rhetorical theories and the philosophical underpinnings of those theories. We have posited that many debaters are adopting a rhetoric of emancipation, but we doubt that this discourse fares well within the instrumental language game which currently dominates academic debate. Moving the language game of debate from the technical to the practical is a prerequisite for the evaluation of emancipatory rhetoric. In academic debate, we must move from an unyielding focus on learning one sort of syntax to a more flexible competence in many

different sorts of discourse. To remain unalterably attached to purposive-rational action in evaluating the arguments made by debaters is to reproduce the conditions for the continued distortion of communication and the unending extension of instrumental and strategic rationalities at the expense of communicative action.

As odd as it might seem, we must call on debaters to recognize and adapt to their roles as philosophers. They must make sense of the world as it appears to them and take steps to envision a more rational society. This is a difficult task. But as Foucault (1989) explains, "it's the very life of philosophy" (p. 201).[4]

REFERENCES

Balthrop, V. W. (1983). The debate judge as "critic of argument": Toward a transcendent perspective. Journal of the American Forensic Association, 20, 1-15.

Bernstein, R. J. (1976). The restructuring of social and political theory. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Conley, T. M. (1989). Rhetoric in the European tradition. New York: Longman.

Elshtain, J. B. (1982). Feminist discourse and its discontents: Language, power, and meaning. Signs: Journal of women in culture and society, 7, 603-621.

Foss, S. K., Foss, K. A., & Trapp, R. (1985). Contemporary perspectives on rhetoric. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.

Foucault, M. (198). The masked philosopher. In S. Lotringer (Ed.), Foucaul live: Interviews 1966-84 (J. Johnston, Trans.). pp. 93-202. New York: Semiotext(e).

Fowler, R., & Kress, G. (1979). Critical linguistics. In R. Fowler, B. Hodge, G. Kress, & T. Trew, Language and control. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Freeley, A. J. (1990). Argumentation and debate: Critical thinking for reasoned decision making (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Jasinski, J. (1988). Ideology, reflection, and alienation in rhetorical and argumentative practice. Journal of the American Forensic Association, 24, 207-217.

Habermas, J. (1970a). Towards a rational society: Student protest, science, and politics (J. Shapiro, Trans.). Boston: Beacon. (original essays published 1968 and 1969)

Habermas, J. (1970b). Towards a theory of communicative competence. Inquiry, 13, 360-375.

Habermas, J. (1984a). The theory of communicative action. Volume one. Reason and the rationalization of society (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Boston: Beacon. (original work published 1981)

Habermas, J. (1984b). Questions and counterquestions. In R. J. Bernstein (Ed.), Habermas and modernity (pp. 161-175). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Habermas, J. (1987). The theory of communicative action. Volume two. Lifeworld and system: A critique of functionalist reason (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Boston: Beacon. (original work published 1981)

Hawkesworth, M. E. (1989). Knowers, knowing, known: Feminist theory and claims of truth. Signs: Journal of women in culture and society, 14, 533-557.

Horkheimer, M. (1972). Critical theory: Selected essays (M. J. McConnell, et al., Trans.). New York: Herder & Herder.

Lyotard, J. (1984). The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

McCarthy, T. (1975). Translator's introduction. In J. Habermas, Legitimation crisis (pp. vii-xxiv). Boston: Beacon.

McCarthy, T. (1978). The critical theory of Jurgen Habermas. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

McGee, M. C. (1990). Text, context, and the fragmentation of contemporary culture. Western Journal of Speech Communication, 54, 274-289.

Rorty, R. (1984). Habermas and Lyotard on postmodernity. In R. J. Bernstein (Ed.), Habermas and modernity (pp. 161-175). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Rorty, R. (1989, Spring). Education without dogma: Truth, freedom, & our universities. Dissent, pp. 198-203.

Rowland, R. C. (1984). **Tabula rasa**: The relevance of debate to argumentation theory. Journal of the American Forensic Association, 21, 76-88.

Simerly, G. (1990, November). General Semantics and the "spirit" of the resolution. Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Chicago.

Ulrich, W. (1984). Debate as dialectic: A defense of the **tabula rasa** approach to judging. Journal of the American Forensic Association, 21, 89-93.

Wenzel, J. W. (1979). Jurgen Habermas and the dialectical perspective on argumentation. Journal of the American Forensic Association, 16, 83-94.

ENDNOTES

[1] Publication outlets include Argumentation and Advocacy, The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta, The Forensic Journal, CEDA Yearbook, and Speaker and Gavel. Various state journals still publish articles relevant to debate; the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri Journal recently published a special issue dedicated to "positioning forensics in the 1990s." At the Speech Communication Association convention, the Forensic Division, Pi Kappa Delta, American Forensic Association, and CEDA all sponsor panels related to academic debate, and regional and state communication association conventions typically include debate-related scholarship in their programs.

[2] See Simerly (1990) for a partial bibliography of delivery criticisms pertaining to academic debate.

[3] At most, current critiques condemn all argumentation which focuses on catastrophic events (i.e., deforestation, overpopulation, technological disaster, nuclear war, etc.). The typical conservative critic rarely perceives a distinction to exist between advocacy which seeks to repair the current political system and advocacy which seeks the abandonment of that system.

[4] For his helpful comments, we thank Darrin Hicks. Any errors of interpretation or analysis are ours alone.